The burden imposed on students by having to learn the characters may seem unnecessarily onerous. However, the task is by no means so formidable as at first appears. Only slightly more than four thousand characters are in common use, few scholars are said to cumber their memories with more than six thousand, radicals and phonetics afford mnemonic assistance, and even the uninitiated foreigner can, with diligence, commit two or three thousand to memory in the course of a year's time.

Several forms of simpler phonetic writing have been devised, some **of** them involving the use of Roman letters. None, however, has gained wide currency. There seems to be no immediate prospect of relegating the traditional script to the discard. Perhaps it is just as well that the Chinese are clinging to it. To abandon it would close the enormous and worthy literature of China's past to the average literate person and so to all but a relatively few scholars.

THE WRITTEN LANGUAGE

The characters can be used to write any of the dialects of the vernacular—although in some of the latter are words for which no special written equivalents exist. However, the larger proportion of Chinese literature has been composed in what may be called the classical style—that which foreigners, with scant Chinese precedent, denominate *wen li.* It is not certain that this ever exactly reproduced any form of the spoken language. Some maintain that, for the sake of economy in the labor of writing, especially before the days of the invention of paper and the brush pen, it was always more condensed than the vernacular. However, there seems to have been a time in the days of the Chou when

it at least approximated to the colloquial. Even today it is obviously related to the vernacular in structure and form. It has greatly influenced the latter, especially by contributing to it quotations, words, and phrases. It has, however, marked contrasts with the speech of every day. Several of its auxiliary words differ from those of *mandarin,* some of its characters, among them the pronouns, are not the same as those commonly used to write the vernacular, and the two are often at variance in the rules of composition. The most striking dissimilarity, however, is in the fact that the literary language employs fewer words to express